

State Reassures Sauget On Dioxin

By Robert Kelly

Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Dioxin contamination at the construction site of a new regional waste-water treatment plant in Sauget poses no threat to residents of nearby neighborhoods, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency has said.

Dioxin has been detected in soil samples at levels as high as 100 parts of dioxin per billion parts of soil, officials said. But the site is strictly an industrial area and has been fenced off from the general public, according to Robert Schleuger, regional manager for water-pollution control with the Illinois EPA in Collinsville.

Schleuger said Monday that no one would be evacuated from the area around the construction site on Mobile Avenue in Sauget. The high dioxin levels are thought to be concentrated in a small area, he said. State EPA officials believe that the dioxin does not endanger any people working at other industries in Sauget, Schleuger added.

Work on an effluent pump station at the site was halted last month after the state EPA reported that dioxin levels of 60 parts per billion had been detected at a parking lot near the pump station.

On Friday, the Illinois EPA announced that further tests of 20 soil samples from the area near the pump station had shown dioxin levels to be

high as 100 parts per billion.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta has said that dioxin levels of more than 1 part per billion could pose a health risk. Such levels have been found at Times Beach in St. Louis County and at northern Jefferson County. The federal and Missouri governments have proposed a buy-out of homes and businesses in those areas.

Richard J. Carlson, director of the Illinois EPA, said that the new dioxin findings in Sauget were a cause for "serious concern." Further tests will be conducted by the U.S. EPA, state EPA and Sauget officials, he said.

Schleuger said the new tests would determine the size of the contaminated area and how deep the dioxin had penetrated the soil. The contaminated soil will be removed and stored at a hazardous-waste site, Schleuger said. The storage site is still to be determined, he added.

The dioxin in Sauget was found at a site where Russell M. Bliss, a waste-hauler from west St. Louis County, had an oil storage tank in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Schleuger said. He said the tank had been removed from the site years ago.

Dioxin has been shown to cause cancer in laboratory animals. In humans, it causes a skin disease called chloracne, and it is suspected of

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